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ABSTRACT

Intended for teachers at all levels, this paper examines the characteristics of creativity and provides activities for creative learning. Following an introduction defining creativity as the ability to draw upon one's past experience, the paper examines the characteristics of creative thinking. This examination is followed by a section that discusses the characteristics of a creative classroom and a creative teacher. The next three sections provide specific activities for creative listening, creative reading, and creative writing. The activities presented include responding to a poem, outlining a story, and writing a story with a plot based on a series of unrelated pictures. (HTH)

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Creativity: Characteristics, Climate and Activities for Creative Learning (K-12)

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CREATIVITY: CHARACTERISTICS, CLIMATE AND ACTIVITIES FOR CREATIVE LEARNING

DIVISION OF READING EFFECTIVENESS
INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
HAROLD H. NEGLEY, SUPERINTENDENT

CREATIVITY: CHARACTERISTICS, CLIMATE AND ACTIVITIES FOR CREATIVE LEARNING

Introduction

James Smith, author of several creativity books, defines creativity as. . .

> sinking down taps into our past experiences and putting these selected experiences together into new patterns, new ideas, or new products. These results need not be new to the world, but new to the individual.[1]

Essentially this definition is concerned with the ability to draw on past experiences to come up with something new. A child can only react to what s/he knows. In creative learning processes, creativity needs to be related to a child's own experiences. These experiences can then be expressed in unique ways--talking, writing, drawing, acting, dancing, etc. The product is as important as the process.

Creativity is a key aspect of learning which can be developed in the classroom. It is not something to be left to chance. Developmentally speaking, creativity is more desirable than conformity.

Teachers need to assume the responsibility for providing experiences which foster creative development so that children can feel free to say. . .

> It is safe for me to take a risk. It is okay for me to try a new way.[2]

CHARACTERISTICS OF CREATIVE THINKING

Creative thinking enhances the dynamics of problem solving. It requires divergent thinking on the part of the teacher as well as the student. Creative thinking allows a child to delve into diverse areas of knowledge. Creative thinking is necessary in the areas of listening, reading, writing and speaking.

Torrence, a well-known author in the area of creativity, identifies the four basic components of creative thinking as: fluency, flexibility, elaboration, and originality.[3] These four skills provide a framework for identifying student responses in creative activities.

Fluency is the ability to think of many ideas or ways of doing things. This is a brainstorming skill that lends itself well to classroom activities and assignments.

Flexibility, another creative skill, is the ability to think in terms of different categories and classifications and to organize ideas into patterns. For example, if asked in what ways one could use a brick, a flexible thinker might answer, "As part of a wall, as a paperweight, as a doorstop, or as a stepping stone."

Elaboration is the ability to take an idea or thought and change it into something different. If given a plan, an elaborate thinker can suggest several ways to carry it out. For example, when asked how to locate a used car, a student might answer: "Put an ad in the paper, ask friends and neighbors, read trade magazines, post a notice in the grocery store, etc."

The fourth component, originality, is to think of or do something no one else has thought of or done. The original

thinker can come up with remote or unusual -- maybe even far-fetched -- responses to an open-ended question.

When teachers encourage creative thinking in their classrooms, they must be ready and willing to listen to a variety of answers and questions. No one answer is correct when students are allowed to go beyond the printed page, memorization, correct responses, and reiteration of facts.

CLASSROOM CLIMATE

The climate of a creative classroom is one of acceptance of diversity.[4] We need classroom procedures that minimize conformity and uniformity, thereby maximizing individuality and autonomy. As much as possible, the instruction is focused toward the individual rather than toward the group.

The process and the product must complement each other in the classroom. In doing this, we can integrate the mastery of skills with the basic learning processes for creative problem solving. Children can then realize that creativity and competency are related in real life.

There are several conditions that can help to provide a more positive climate and/or environment within a classroom to foster creativity. Consider the following list as a beginning to build a more diverse classroom setting.[5]

1. Provide materials and situations that are open-ended.
2. Allow students <u>time</u> to solve their own problems.
3. Allow outcomes to be unpredictable.
4. Encourage students to generate and develop their own ideas.

5. Encourage uniqueness, originality, individuality and diversity.
6. Develop skills of constructive criticism and evaluation.
7. Provide numerous ideas and objects that can be manipulated and explored.
8. Practice democratic processes in the classroom.
9. Stimulate inventiveness with varied materials and opportunities for self-expression.
10. Make assignments appropriate to the knowledge and potential of the child.
11. Provide unlimited experiences to attain an objective with a great deal of practice.
12. Encourage and compliment students at all stages of development.

The atmosphere and climate of a classroom are readily discerned by students. It is vital that they sense warmth, acceptance and appreciation in every classroom.

BEING A CREATIVE TEACHER

Creative expression in listening, writing, or reading activities must come from within the student. The teacher's role is to unleash the feelings and inner thoughts, and to uncover and build upon children's natural gifts of insight and thought. We, as teachers, cannot produce ideas, but we can foster expectations, offer encouragement, and develop an increased sensitivity to student abilities.

A creative teacher is a caring teacher. He/she cares about the following:[6]

1. The individual.
2. How the student feels about himself.
3. Rewarding students for creative thoughts.
4. Providing a rich, stimulating environment that is purposeful but not threatening.
5. Student's right to express unusual ideas.

The teacher should practice constructive criticism as well as tolerance. Constructive criticism involves both a criticism and an exploration of alternatives. Students should feel free to seek assistance in solving a problem. Tolerance is needed to protect the unusual ideas of students and encourage production of new and different ideas.

The overall teacher attitude must be sympathetic, understanding, encouraging and helpful. The challenge of creative teaching is to help children build their own strengths and form awareness of their own limits. The teacher should be supportive, yet withdraw and let the child face situations on his own at some point. The vitality and strength of even one teacher's interest can form the basic foundation for creative expression in all curriculum areas.

CREATIVE LISTENING

Listening is an essential component of the language arts curriculum. It is not automatically learned and can be taught as a skill. Miriam Wilt, in a study quoted in a paper by Lucretia Broussard, revealed that children spend over half the school day

listening.[7] Therefore, teachers should be teaching listening as a fundamental tool of communication. To go one step further, teachers need to help the students become creative listeners. Pupils need to be challenged--to think as they listen and to interpret what they hear.

ACTIVITIES FOR CREATIVE LISTENING

RESPOND TO A POEM

Have pupils relax and listen to you read a poem. After the poem, pupils can:

1. Act out the poem.
2. Draw a picture about the poem.
3. Decide on a title for the poem.

GAIN INFORMATION

Describe a picture to the class. Have them draw a picture of what they hear. Then have them compare their pictures with the actual picture.

GUESS WHO?

A child gives a detailed description of a character in fiction, a famous person, etc. The rest of the class takes turns guessing who the mystery person is. The child who guesses correctly gives the next description.

REPEAT

Give a child directions to a familiar location. Ask the child to repeat the message to another child, then have the message repeated orally. Compare the original message with the resulting one.

SOUNDS

Tape record a series of recognizable sounds such as the following:

radio	baby crying
phone call	applause
bells	snoring
alarm	sneezing
doorbell	siren

Play the tape for the class and have them identify the sounds they hear.

EARS ONLY

During a field trip or on a walk, have the class rest on the grass, cover their eyes, and just listen for a minute. Then try to list all the different sounds they heard and identify them.

VARIATION: Give the class a situation such as a storm, circus, parade, dentist office, gym class. Have them name or list all the sounds which they associate with that situation.

TALK ON A TOPIC

Have each pupil make up a ridiculous topic. Put all the topics in a box. Let each child pull one out and talk about it for two minutes.

RADIO

Help students tell stories into the tape recorder; add a class announcer to make a radio show. Play the show to the class and encourage discussion groups on the different story topics.

WEIRD STORIES

Divide the class into groups of four students. One student makes up a weird or unusual story while the others listen. The second student tells the same story, adding some new details. Continue until each student has retold and added to the story.

ORAL SCAVENGER HUNT

Children listen carefully to a list of items. They cannot write them down. Give them 10 minutes to find the items and report back to you. This activity may be indoors or outdoors.

The activities will be effective if you discuss the value of listening with your students. Never ask the students to listen to something for pleasure and then test them on it later. The children also need to feel their contributions are of value. Allow them to express their own questions, answers and ideas without tension, competition or fear. If this give-and-take of ideas and opinions is an integral part of daily classroom life, creative listening will develop in a positive way.

CREATIVE READING

Creative reading is reading that inspires the reader to change his behavior in some way so as to produce a new or different product. Creative reading programs deal with reading as a creative process rather than a receptive process. This creative process produces divergent thinkers with new ideas, flexibility of thought, and the ability to go beyond the literal meaning of printed words.[8]

James Smith lists the characteristics of a good creative reading program as follows:[9]

1. develops creative thought as one of the objectives
2. plans purposefully to develop creative behavior
3. emphasizes discovery and self-learning
4. avoids rigid conformity
5. provides satisfying reading experiences
6. gives the child opportunities to practice creative powers

Teachers may need to readjust their reading program to assure that creative processes are taking place. Some methods are listed below:

1. Have the types of reading materials that stimulate creative thoughts.[10]
   a. selections that have interesting language patterns
   b. imaginative stories that are unfinished
   c. books that expose children to questions
   d. books that give children practice in drawing
2. Structure oral questions and discussions that will arouse children to think creatively.
   a. Do not limit children to a single response.
   b. Give children a chance to examine all possibilities and discuss each other's responses.
3. Assign reading tasks that open doors to productive creative thoughts.
   a. Have varied tasks such as oral, written, affective, cognitive, artistic, dramatic or musical

b. Have children read for critical analysis, for synthesizing materials, and for evaluating materials.

Teaching reading is an active, vital process in which one can use varied approaches, novel ideas and purposeful designs.

ACTIVITIES FOR CREATIVE READING

CUT AND RAP

Students cut articles from the newspaper and post them on a bulletin board during the week. At the end of the week, students have a panel discussion focused on current issues.

THE BOOK NOOK LOOK

Provide books at varied reading levels that deal in subjects of interest such as:

What is Women's Lib?

Read About E.S.P.!

Can you protect yourself?

How to perform CPR!

Each student chooses a subject and reads about it for one week. Plan a second week to develop a project on the subject area. Then schedule displays and/or discussions on each subject for the class.

A BOOK SHOP

How-to books may be used to stimulate interest in reading and following printed instruction. The result of this study plan is a process such as baking a cake, building a model, knitting a hat, etc., which results in a product made according to written instructions.

MYSTERY GAME

In a special place each day, write a clue to a mystery. Children read each clue daily and try to solve the mystery on Friday. Read all the answers aloud and discuss the mystery.

A READING WALK

Take students on a walk around the school. Have them bring a paper and pencil to write down what they see during the walk. Have children read their lists to the class.

FOLK TALE CHARACTERS

Read a folk tale and discuss the various characters (dwarf, elf, witch, fairy, troll, pixy, gnome). Have children read about one of the characters and then describe and define the figure to the class.

OUTLINE A STORY

Read a story to the class. Have students propose titles for the story. List the titles and vote on the best one. Have groups of five students compose five sentences about the story based on this outline:

1. Where and when the story takes place
2. The main characters
3. The problem
4. How the problem is solved
5. How the story ends

Display the finished sentences for all to read.

NEWSPAPER POEMS

Each student is given a section of the newspaper, from which s/he is to cut words to form an original poem. The product can be read to the class or posted around the classroom.

NEW IDEAS

Write an incomplete sentence about a person place, or object in a familiar story. Example (from "Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp"):

The magician_____. The readers complete the sentence with information the author may have added to make the story more interesting.

THEN AND NOW

Have students read a story that takes place in an earlier era. After reading the story, students write as many ways as possible that the story would be different in modern times.

GROUP READ-IN

Have groups of students choose a book of interest. All members in the group then read the same book. Each member reports on one-fourth of the book as they take turns retelling the story.

In teaching creative reading it is important to allow children to proceed at their own pace, to try to improve the students' self-esteem, to guide students' rapport with one another, and to provide time to discuss and share ideas with others. The creative reading process requires time, flexibility and planning on the part of the teacher, but the results are worth the effort.

CREATIVE WRITING

Creative writing is a means of expression which everyone can enjoy in one or more of its many forms. It means more if children can first write about themselves or their own personal experiences.

Pratt states that "children have greater success if their first reading attempts are written by themselves".[11] Teachers need to understand the reading process and background skills necessary for writing.

It is essential to utilize the creative thinking strategies in teaching creative writing. There are some additional guidelines that may enhance creative writing:[12]

1. Create an atmosphere where children feel free to express themselves.
2. Allow time for children to read their work aloud.
3. Allow anonymity.
4. Do not expect a universal writing style.
5. Help children develop a sense of audience.
6. Write yourself!
7. Plan time for writing everyday.
8. Limit corrections to a minimum.

CREATIVE WRITING ACTIVITIES

DESCRIBE A MODEL

Have an object or person as a model before the class. Ask students to write a detailed description of the model and a situation where the model would be.

CANDID DESCRIPTION

Give students an imaginary scene, such as, "Thousands of people are leaving a football game. You are describing one person in the crowd so your friend can locate him and get a ride home." Ask students to write their own imaginary story starters for other students to develop.

"PASS IT ON" STORIES

The teacher lists a series of words related to episodes of a story. Each student begins a story using words listed on the board. After two minutes, they pass it to the person on their left. This person reads it and writes in another two minutes. The story can be ended at any time and read to the class.

WRITE IT, DON'T SAY IT

Allow ten minutes daily to communicate only by writing. This includes teacher as well as students.

DISCUSS AND WRITE

As a task sheet, use topic sentences and five questions that suggest additional details. Give task sheets to groups of three to five students. They are to write collectively and then share their story.

ACROSTICS

Use a child's own words and help him/her create an acrostic story.

For example:

Jack in the Beanstalk
Ought to eat meat, but
Kinfolk tell me he
Eats beans, beans, beans
Regardless of the time of day.

WRITER'S CLUB

Form a club where interested students can write to pen pals, favorite authors, other cities.

PICTURE WRITING

Use a series of five pictures, giving students ten minutes to write a plot outline of a story incorporating the events in the picture in the order given. After reading stories aloud, the pictures are shuffled and students follow the same directions as before. Stories are read aloud and classified in terms of theme, types of endings, etc.

WEAR-A-WORD DAY

Have class members wear tee shirts, jewelry, buttons, etc. with words on them. Read and write all the words on the board and use them for creative writing, improvisation, choral reading, etc.

LETTER ASSOCIATION

Have students think of an animal, a person and a verb for each of the letters of the alphabet. Then use these words in a sentence or several sentences to make a coherent story.

CONCLUSION

Creativity is more than a word in the curriculum guide or a skill to use in the classroom. It is a reflection of the person who is listening, speaking, reading, or writing creatively, and its benefits last a lifetime.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Marilyn Wikstrom, "Creative Reading for the Gifted Child," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Reading Association, 1976.

[2]Beverly Miller and James Ballanca, "Getting Ready-Ten Promises to Keep," Instructor, 87 (1977), pp. 44-52.

[3]Nicholas Karolides, "Creative Teaching: Motivating Learning," Wisconsin English Journal, 20, No. 3 (October 1977), pp. 1-25.

[4]Ruth Bernstein Hyman, "Creativity in Open and Traditional Classrooms," The Elementary School Journal, 79 (1978), pp. 269-274.

[5]Mauree Applegate, Freeing Children to Write (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 20-31.

[6]Lucretia Broussard, in a paper presented at the annual meeting of the California Reading Association, 1978.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Antonia Y. Maya, "Write to Read: Improving Reading Through Creative Writing," Reading Teacher, 32 (1979), pp. 813-817.

[12]Ibid.

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